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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to examine school administrators' perceptions of Project ROME (Results-Oriented Management in Education) and more traditional learning experiences, like educational administration course work at the college level. Also examined was the perceived relationship of instructional alternatives (Project ROME) to role and performance in school administration. The semantic differential technique was used to assess school administrator attitudes about the relative goodness of 31 concepts. Results indicated that school administrators (1) perceive school problem-solving as a key process in administration, (2) perceive clinical training alternatives, like Project ROME, as being more relevant to problem-solving than more traditional alternatives, (3) perceive such alternatives at least as relevant to performance as traditional alternatives, and (4) perceive professional relationships with peer and teaching staff as essential. The paper concludes that research like the foregoing can help in understanding how school administrators and learners learn and thus how school organizations improve. (Author/LD)

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Learning to Lead: Learner Perception of an In-Service Alternative in School Administration

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LEARNING TO LEAD: LEARNER PERCEPTION OF AN IN-SERVICE ALTERNATIVE IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

There is a distinction between what sociologists or anthropoligists call "schooling" and what educators call "learning". Typically, schooling refers to the socialization process applicable to role-taking in a specific social system or society (Parsons, 1959). Wolcott (1973) and others have described the development of school administrators in this context, emphasizing rites of passage and their consequences for the school administrator subculture and the school organization. Learning in school administrator preparation programs has been viewed as the process by which school administrators acquire a certain form of knowledge and specify it to practice (Willower, 1963). This form of knowledge has been articulated in terms of both common and specialized learning in educational administration (Leu and Rudman, 1963, and Miller, 1962) and in terms of theoretical dimensions of educational administration (Hoy, 1978, Monahan, 1975, or Halpin, 1958). While the "schooling" of administrators in education can be a fruitful framework for understanding the organizational behavior of these individuals, the focus of this discussion is on "learning" and alternatives for learning in the preparation of school administrators, specifically in terms of the perceived relationship of these alternatives to practice.

Purpose

Traditionally, courses of study for the preparation of school administrators have tended to be "course-bound" and "time-bound", a course-for-credit approach characterized by the assumption" ... that no other course, whenever taken, is equal to the one being required and that students can learn only when seated in front of the professor (Campbell, 1964)." The need to develop and field test functional alternatives for existing learning experiences in school administrator preparation programs is well documented in the literature (McCleary, 1973, or Willower and Culbertson, 1964 as examples), but few operational examples of such innovation and experimentation are apparent in the operation of contemporary preparation programs. Project ROME (Results-Oriented Management in Education) may be an example of such experimentation, a training component which emphasizes what Snyder (1974) might describe as a more "clinical" less traditional learning experience for practicing school administrators. Viewing school administrators as learners, the purpose of this paper is to examine school administrators' perceptions of Project ROME and more traditional learning experiences, and the perceived relationship of these instructional alternatives to role and performance in school administration.

Definition of Terms

Project ROME-FOCUS:

FOCUS (Field-Oriented Competency Utilization System) is composed of two (2) components: an assessment component designed to describe and measure the performance of practicing school administrators in terms of the perceptions of relevent reference groups in the school organization (Ellett, et.al., 1976); and an in-service learning experience which systemically integrates a pool of school administrator behaviors which have been verified and validated against meaningful school outcomes into a performance-based, problem-solving model which operationalizes participant learning in terms of the observable consequences of the learning experience for the school organization (Licata and Ellis, 1976).

Clinical Program Components:

They are the structural features of the ROME-FOCUS learning experience. These include individualization of instruction through the development of individualized objectives based at least in part on a personal diagnostic profile generated from the results of on-the-job assessment; a field-based or on-the-job instructional setting; a process orientation specified in terms of a shared, in-house problem solving model called Consequence Analysis (Licata, 1978); and the evaluation of learner progress based the accomplishment of both individualized and core problem-solving objectives which are specified with respect to observable outcomes in the learner's

school.

Project Staff:

They facilitate the ROME-FOCUS learning experience. Typically professors of educational administration, these facilitators work with students in a "helper-helpee" relationship (Rogers, 1961) which focuses directly on the learner's needs and problems as a school administrator. This relationship includes diagnostic counseling about assessment results, regular field visits to the learner's school to address specific learner concerns, and peer-group seminars aimed at the modeling and constructive critism of the problem-solving process as it applies to the varied and differential school settings represented in the group.

Traditional Training:

This refers to educational administration course work in higher education institutions involving college-based or classroom-based instruction which might be characterized in terms of a reduced degree of individualization and field work as well as an increase in the degree to which learner progress is measured in terms of classroom performance.

Performance in School Administration:

Using the terminology of the ROME assessment system, performance is specified as functional areas of responsibility, like curriculum and instruction, staff and pupil personnel, administrative operations, such as decision-making, evaluating and communicating, and in terms

of relationships with relevent reference groups of the school like teachers, students, and community.

Some Previous Research

During the initial field-test of the ROME-FOCUS learning experience, twenty-two (22) practicing school administrators participated in the program. After the completion of this initial field-test, the ROME-FOCUS staff conducted both an internal and external evaluation of the program. The results of the internal evaluation appeared to suggest that training objectives were met to a large degree. The learners favored Project ROME-FOCUS, field-based instruction, and competency-based instruction over traditional graduate education, traditional graduate courses in educational administration, and college-based instruction. Meeting evaluations suggested that participants viewed ROME-FOCUS seminars as being equal to or better than on-campus course meetings (Licata, 1976). These findings were not unlike those reported elsewhere in which higher education students rated teachers of on-campus courses significantly lower than teachers of off-campus courses (Gage, 1961) The external evaluation, based on the application of a pre, post and control group analysis employing the ROME assessment system, depicted an increase in the principals' self perceptions and the perceptions of teachers and external observers as to the degree of frequency and effectiveness with which the principal performed in

the school organization. Teacher pre and post assessment responses to a multi-dimension measure of school climate were statistically significant in favor of higher (more positive) post assessment scores for all sub-scales of the instrument (Ellett, 1976). While the results of the internal and external evaluations were encouraging, the investigators were quick to emphasize limitations in sample, operational definitions and design.

Method

Instrumentation:

The investigators employed Osgood's semantic differntial technique as a means of assessing school administrator attitudes about the relative goodness of 31 specific concpets like: "School Problem Solving," "Project ROME-FOCUS," "My Relationship with Staff," or "My Performance in Curriculum and Instruction." Three (3) items "interesting-boring," "fresh-stale," and "meaningful-meaningless," operationalized the evaluative dimension of meaning. Each pair employed a seven step scale, scored 1-7. A score of seven connotes a positive rating; a score of one conotes a negative rating. The responses to the three pairs were summed to produce a highest possible score of 21 and a lowest possible score of 7 for each concept.

Sample:

During the initial year of the ROME-FOCUS field test (1975-1976) 19 school administrators from Georgia participated in the project. The following year (1976-1977) 12 school administrators participated in the training experience. Upon completion of the ROME-FOCUS program,

these administrators competed the semantic differential described above. At approximately the same times, 26 school administrators from the same geographic area and 20 school administrators from Georgia and North Carolina responded to a modified version of the semantic differential. Since these last two groups had not experienced the ROME-FOCUS training experiences, concepts that only project participants would understand were omitted from this modified version of the semantic differential. While this last group of 46 school administrators was not a "true" control group, the group's relative inexperience with the training program may provide a framework which suggests the possible attitudes of ROME-FOCUS participants before ever experiencing project concepts. Overall, 77 practicing school administrators completed one of the two forms of the semantic differential during May 1976 or May 1977 respectively.

Data Analysis:

Contained within the framework of the initial ROME-FOCUS internal evaluation (Licata, 1976) and based on a relatively small number of responses (n=19), Spearman inter-correlations of training concepts with performance concepts on the semantic differential instruments suggested that a replication of this analysis with a larger sample based on two years of training and data collection might be a fruitful perspective in describing training alternatives and their perceived relationship to leadership behavior, particularly in terms of the perceptions of the learners themselves. The analyses

employed this investigation at least in part constitute such a replication. The various concepts, operationalized with the semantic differential pairs, were inter-correlated using Spearman's rank-order correlation technique, a statistic which does not require the assumption of a normal population (Blalock, 1972). Since the purposes of this study were descriptive or inductive in nature, the researchers looked for relationships between concepts that could be generalized in terms of tentative insights relative to learner perceptions of training alternatives for practicing school administrators and school administrative performance.

Results

School Problem Solving and Administration:

The process of rational problem solving is known by many names. Included among them are reason, rational decision-making, the scientific method; or, in Dewey's (1938) framework, the theory of inquiry and reflective methods. The process has been viewed in the literature of educational administration both in terms of the procedures that compose rational decision-making and the barriers to such decision-making (Feldman and Kanter, 1965, Taylor, 1965, Griffiths, 1959, Simon, 1958). Others have considered rational problem solving as a vehicle for educational change (Willower, 1975, and Havelock, 1973). With this in mind, the basic assumption of the ROME-FOCUS training program was simply that, "Competency in school administration is the ability to effectively define and

and solve important school problems and to do so in terms of observable outcomes in the school organization". As a means of testing this assumption against the perceptions of practicing school administrators, the researchers examined the relationship between administrator responses to the concept "school problem solving" and the concepts "my role in the school organization" and "my total performance as a school administrator". The results of this analysis are specified in table 1.

The correlations between administrator perceptions of school problem solving and both role and performance in school administration were positive and significant ($p < .05$). The correlations between school problem solving and role in the school were .78 for project participants, .54 for the control group, and .66 for the total group. The correlations between school problem solving and administrator performance were .61 for project participants, .25 for the control group, and .42 for the total group.

Table 2 describes the relationship between alternative training concepts and school problem solving. Using the perceptions of project participants, who could legitimately evaluate ROME training and more traditional modes of training, each descriptor of the project, Project ROME-FOCUS, field-based instruction and competency-based instruction, were positively and significantly correlated to school problem solving. Correlations were .43, .41 and .41 respectively. None of correlations between traditional

Table 1. The Correlations Between School Administration and Problem Solving.

School Administration Concepts	School Problem Solving N	r	p
Training Group:			
My Role in the School Organization	31	.78	.001
My Total Performance as a School Administrator	31	.61	.001
Control Group:			
My Role in the School Organization	46	.54	.001
My Total Performance as a School Administrator	46	.25	.05
Total:			
My Role in the School Organization	77	.66	.001
My Total Performance as a School Administrator	77	.42	.001

Table 2. The Correlations Between Training and School Problem Solving

ROME-FOCUS Descriptors	School Problem Solving N*	r	p
Project ROME-FOCUS	31	.43	.01
Field-Based Instruction	31	.41	.01
Competency Based Instruction	31	.41	.01
Traditional Training Descriptors			
Traditional Educational Administration Courses	31	.09	NS
College-Based Instruction	31	.06	NS
Traditional Graduate Training	31	.14	NS

* Sample represents 31 project participants.

training descriptors, traditional educational administration courses, college-based instruction, or traditional graduate training and school problem solving were significant ($p < .05$)

Training and Performance:

Three (3) composites were created to operationalize school administration performance: a composite of six (6) concepts describing functional areas of responsibility (FA), a composite of six (6) concepts describing administrative operations (AO), and a composite of five concepts (5) describing professional relationships (PR). Two (2) composites were constructed to measure perceptions of training alternatives: one (1) composite of the three (3) ROME descriptors noted in table 2 and another composite of the three (3) traditional training descriptors from that same table. Results of inter-correlations between training and performance measures are presented in table 3.

Rome participants perceived positive and significant relationships between the ROME-FOCUS composite and the composites of administrative operations (r=.62) and professional relationships (r=.49). There were no significant relationship between the ROME-FOCUS composite and the functional areas composite; nor were there significant relationships between any of the three performance composites and the traditional training composite for this group. Taken concept by concept, 44% of all possible correlations between ROME-FOCUS training concepts and performance concepts were positive

Table 3. The Correlations Between Training and Performance

Performance Composites	N	r	P
	ROME-FOCUS Composite (3)		
ROME-FOCUS Group:			
Functional Areas of Responsibility (6)	31	.25	NS
Administrative Operations (6)	31	.62	.001
Professional Relationships (5)	31	.49	.01
ROME-FOCUS Group:	Traditional Training Composite (3)		
Functional Area of Responsibility (6)	31	.18	NS
Administrative Operations (6)	31	-.06	NS
Professional Relations (5)	31	-.03	NS
Control Group:			
Functional Area of Responsibility (6)	46	-.03	NS
Administrative Operations (6)	46	.27	.05
Professional Relationship (5)	46	.31	.05

and significant, 6% were negative and significant, and 50% were non-significant. There were no significant relationships between traditional training concepts and performance concepts for this group.

In terms of the perceptions of the control group, there were positive and significant relationships between the traditional training composite and the composites for administrative operations (r=.27) and professional relationships (r=.31). No significant relationship emerged for the relationship between traditional training and functional areas of responsibility. Taken concept by concept, 5% of all possible correlations were positive and significant, the remainder were not significant.

Table 4, employing ROME participant perceptions, presents a more focused analysis of the relationship between specific training components in Project ROME-FOCUS and the three (3) performance composites. Upon inspecting the inter-correlation matrix, these concepts seemed tofall naturally into two (2) distinct groups: low and high hinderance components. Low hinderance components were characterized by reduced book or paperwork,, activity-oriented, multimedia presentations and activities. High hinderance components were characterized by two (2) dimensional (book and paper-work) media and activities. Low hinderance components were positively and significantly correlated to each of the three (3) performance composites. High hinderance components were either negatively and

Table 4. The Correlations Between ROME Components and Performance

Low Hinderance ROME Training Components	Performance Composites FA	AO	PR
Core Problem-Solving Objectives	.46*	.57*	.64*
Individualized Objectives	.33*	.55*	.60*
Consequence Analysis (problem-solving model)	.17	.53*	.51*
Visits to Other Schools	.35*	.45*	.52*
Resources Modules	.27*	.52*	.33*
Higher Hinderance ROME Training Components			
My Daily Log	-.15	-.38*	-.35*
My Final Report	-.21	-.30*	-.28*
My Field Manual	-.20	-.34*	-.30*
My Consequence Analysis Text	-.21	-.34*	-.30*

* Significantly different from zero ($p < .05$), n=31 ROME participants.

and significantly correlated or there were no significant relationships. Note that while significant positive correlations emerged for consequence analysis (the ROME problem solving model), significant negative correlations emerged for the consequence analysis textbook and performance composites.

Professional Relationships and School Administration:

Participation in Project ROME-FOCUS emphasized deliberate relationships with at least three (3) specific reference groups; fellow project participants or school administrators (PP), the teaching staff in their schools (TS), and the project's instructional staff (PS). As table 5 shows, participants' perceptions of these three (3) reference groups were positively and significantly related to their perception of role and performance in school administration as well as school problem solving. The strongest relationships (r=.56 - .71) existed between the perceptions of peer and teacher relationships and school administration concepts; slightly weaker relationships emerged between participant perceptions of relationships with the instructional staff and the school administration concepts (r=.34 - .51).

Discussion

Significant positive correlations were apparent between school administrator perceptions of school problem solving and school administration. The strongest relationships were between administrator perceptions of their role and problem solving. Further, relation-

Table 5. The Correlations Between Professional Relationships and School Administration

School Administration Concepts	Professional Relationship PP	TS	PS
My Role in the School Organization	.56	.58	.34
My Total Performance as a School Administrator	.65	.65	.51
School Problem Solving	.57	.71	.47

All correlations significantly differnt from zero ($p < .05$)
n=31 ROME participants.

ships were somewhat more positive for ROME participants as compared with the control group, perhaps due to the problem-solving emphasis of the project. Keeping this in mind, further analysis depicted significant positive relationships between ROME training descriptors and school problem solving, but no significant relationships appeared between traditional training concepts and school problem solving, stated as general and tentative propositions:

P_1: School administrators tend to perceive school problem solving as a key process in school administration, perhaps even as a primary descriptor of their role in the school organization.

P_2: School administrators tend to perceive clinical training alternatives, like ROME-FOCUS, as being more relevant to the process of school problem solving than more traditional training alternatives.

Examining the perceived relationships between training and performance, the ROME training group perceived relatively positive relationships between ROME training and various measures of performance both in terms of the correlations between composites and in terms of the percentage of total possible correlations between specific concpets. The functional areas of responsibility composite just barely missed the lowest possible significance level ($p < .05$). ROME participants saw no significant relationships between traditional training composite and any of the three (3) performance composites. The control group perceived positive relationships between traditional training and performance both in terms of the correlations

between composites and to a lesser extent in terms of the percentage of total possible correlations between specific concepts. As with the ROME group, the functional areas of responsibility composite fell short of a significant relationship. However, the relationships between traditional training and performance were somewhat weaker for the control group when compared to the relationship between ROME training and performance for the ROME training group. In comparing both groups percepations of the traditional training and performance relationships, it might be sugtested that experience with a clinical training alternative may reduce the perceived relevence of traditional training for practicing school administrators. Generalizing this information in the form of tentative propositions, it might be suggested that:

P_3: School administrators tend to perceive clinical training alternatives, like ROME-FOCUS, as being at least as relevent to performance as more traditional training alternatives.

In reviewing the relationships between specific ROME training components and performance composites, it was interesting to note an almost inverse relationship between the level of hinderance or book and paperwork inherent in a component and the component's perceived relationship with performance. It is particularly interesting in light of the strong possibility that high hinderance media are often the "bread and butter" of traditional forms of training. Even when this media was masked by the clinical context

of ROME, the learners were able to descriminate media in terms of its perceived relevance to practice. This apparent distaste for two (2) dimensional instructional media may reflect the pressures experienced by these administrators in a "stimulus overload" work environment. Certainly, this finding is consistent with the often heard "ivory tower" critisms of their higher education learning experiences. Stated as a proposition:

P_4: School administrators tend to perceive an inverse relationship between the hinderance level of an instructional component and its relevence to practice.

As part of the ROME-FOCUS experience, learners were required to interact regularly with fellow participants in problem-solving seminars, with their teachers in solving an important school problem, and of course the project instructional staff. The examination of the relationships between learner perceptions of relationships with these three (3) relevent reference groups and school administration and problem solving concepts suggested that relatively strong positive relationships exist, It was interesting to note that relationships between peer (usually other principals) or teachers and school administration were somewhat stronger than the perceived relationship between the project staff and school administration. This may suggest that in a clinical setting other professionals, in addition to professors of educational administration, can play an important role in school administrator learning. Stated as a final proposition:

P 5 : School administrators tend to perceive professional relationships with peer and teaching staff as being at least as relevent to school administration and problem solving as relationships with the instructional staff of clincial training experience.

Conclusion

It is probably worthwhile to emphasize the tentative nature of the generalizations proposed in this investigation. Certainly limitations in sample and operational definitions are apparent. For instance, the use of a rather general concept like "traditional graduate instruction," may not have accurately or fairly operationalized contemporary modes of instruction for school administrators, particularly in comparison to more specific concepts like "Project ROME-FOCUS". School administrator perceptions of their own performance have often shown poor relationships to meaningful school outcomes (Ellett, et.al., 1976). These perceptions may or may not warrent serious consideration in the evaluation of various training modes. Definition of the terms "clinical" as opposed to "traditional" still need refinement. Further, the question of the degree to which these findings can be generalized to other settings, other groups and other programs is a valid one and one worthy of further inquiry. In the light of all these limitations and disclaimers, it maybe more conforting for those of us in the business of preparing school administrators to simply discount these findings. More comforting perhaps, but hardly as constructive and challenging as research we might employ which examines present learning

experience in the light of experimental alternatives and the consequences of these for the learner. Such research may be a fruitful vehicle for helping us understand how school administrators and leaders learn, and perhpas even, how school organizations improve.

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